

JOHN BUNYAN

THE JERUSALEM SINNER
SAVED; OR, GOOD
NEWS FOR THE VILEST
OF MEN

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The Jerusalem Sinner Saved; or, Good News for the Vilest of Men

BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM.—Luke xxiv. 47

The whole verse runs thus: “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

The words were spoken by Christ, after he rose from the dead, and they are here rehearsed after an historical manner, but do contain in them a formal commission, with a special clause therein.

The commission is, as you see, for the preaching of the gospel, and is very distinctly inserted in the holy record by Matthew and Mark. “Go teach all nations,” &c. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel unto every creature.” Matt. xxviii. 19; Mark xvi. 15. Only this cause is in special mentioned by Luke, who saith, That as Christ would have the doctrine of repentance and remission of sins preached in his name among all nations, so he would have the people of Jerusalem to have the first proffer thereof. Preach it, saith Christ, in all nations, but begin at Jerusalem.

The apostles then, though they had a commission so large as to give them warrant to go and preach the gospel in all the world, yet by this clause they were limited as to the beginning of their ministry: they were to begin this work at Jerusalem. “Beginning at Jerusalem.”

Before I proceed to an observation upon the words, I must (but briefly) touch upon two things: namely,

- I. Show you what Jerusalem now was.
- II. Show you what it was to preach the gospel to them.
- I. For the first, Jerusalem is to be considered, either,
 1. With respect to the descent of her people: or,
 2. With respect to her preference and exaltation: or,
 3. With respect to her present state, as to her decays.

First, As to her descent: she was from Abraham, the sons of Jacob, a people that God singled out from the rest of the nations to set his love upon them.

Secondly, As to her preference or exaltation, she was the place of God’s worship, and that which had in and with her the special tokens and signs of God’s favour and presence, above any other people in the world. Hence the tribes went up to Jerusalem to worship; there was God’s house, God’s high-priest, God’s sacrifices accepted, and God’s eye, and God’s heart perpetually; Psalm lxxvi. 1, 2; Psalm cxxii.; 1 Kings ix. 3. But,

Thirdly, We are to consider Jerusalem also in her decays; for as she is so considered, she is the proper object of our text, as will be further showed by and by.

Jerusalem, as I told you, was the place and seat of God’s worship, but now decayed, degenerated, and apostatized. The word, the rule of worship, was rejected of them, and in its place they had put and set up their own traditions; they had rejected also the most weighty ordinances, and put in the room thereof their own little things, Matt. xv.; Mark vii. Jerusalem was therefore now greatly backsliding, and become the place where truth and true religion were much defaced.

It was also now become the very sink of sin and seat of hypocrisy, and gulf where true religion was drowned. Here also now reigned presumption, and groundless confidence in God, which is the bane of souls. Amongst its rulers, doctors, and leaders, envy, malice, and blasphemy vented itself against the power of godliness, in all places where it was espied; as also against the promoters of it; yea, their Lord and Maker could not escape them.

In a word, Jerusalem was now become the shambles, the very slaughter-shop for saints. This was the place wherein the prophets, Christ, and his people, were most horribly persecuted and murdered.

Yea, so hardened at this time was this Jerusalem in her sins, that she feared not to commit the biggest, and to bind herself by wish under the guilt and damning evil of it; saying, when she had murdered the Son of God, “His blood be upon us and our children.”

And though Jesus Christ did, both by doctrine, miracles, and holiness of life, seek to put a stop to their villanies, yet they shut their eyes, stopped their ears, and rested not, till, as was hinted before, they had driven him out of the world. Yea, that they might, if possible, have extinguished his name, and exploded his doctrine out of the world, they, against all argument, and in despite of Heaven, its mighty hand, and undeniable proof of his resurrection, did hire soldiers to invent a lie, saying, his disciples stole him away from the grave; on purpose that men might not count him the Saviour of the world, nor trust in him for the remission of sins.

They were, saith Paul, contrary to all men: for they did not only shut up the door of life against themselves, but forbade that it should be opened to any else. “Forbidding us,” saith he, “to preach to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway;” Matt. xxiii. 35; chap. xv. 7–9; Mark vii. 6–8; Matt. iii. 7–9; John viii. 33, 41; Matt. xxvii. 18; Mark iii. 30; Matt. xxiii. 37; Luke xiii. 33, 34; Matt. xxvii. 25; chap. xx. 11–16; 1 Thess. ii. 14–16.

This is the city, and these are the people; this is their character, and these are their sins: nor can there be produced their parallel in all this world. Nay, what world, what people, what nation, for sin and transgression, could, or can be compared to Jerusalem! especially if you join to the matter of fact the light they sinned against, and the patience which they abused. Infinite was the wickedness upon this account which they committed.

After all their abusings of wise men, and prophets, God sent unto them John Baptist, to reduce them, and then his Son to redeem them; but they would be neither reduced nor redeemed, but persecuted both to the death. Nor did they, as I said, stop here; the holy apostles they afterwards persecuted also to death, even so many as they could; the rest they drove from them unto the utmost corners.

II. I come now to show you what it was to preach the gospel to them. It was, saith Luke, “to preach to them repentance and remission of sins” in Christ’s name; or, as Mark has it, to bid them “repent and believe the gospel,” Mark i. 15; not that repentance is a cause of remission, but a sign of our hearty reception thereof. Repentance is therefore here put to intimate, that no pretended faith of the gospel is good that is not accompanied with it: and this he doth on purpose, because he would not have them deceive themselves: for with what faith can he expect remission of sins in the name of Christ, that is not heartily sorry for them? Or how shall a man be able to give to others a satisfactory account of his unfeigned subjection to the gospel, that yet abides in his impenitency?

Wherefore repentance is here joined with faith in the way of receiving the gospel. Faith is that without which it cannot be received at all; and repentance that without which it cannot be received unfeignedly. When therefore Christ says, he would have repentance and remission of sins preached in his name among all nations, it is as much as to say, I will that all men every where be sorry for their sins, and accept of mercy at God’s hand through me, lest they fall under his wrath in the judgment.

For as I had said, without repentance, what pretence soever men have of faith, they cannot escape the wrath to come. Wherefore Paul saith, God commands “all men every where to repent,” (in order to their salvation), “because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained;” Acts xvii. 31.

And now to come to this clause, “Beginning at Jerusalem;” that is, that Christ would have Jerusalem have the first offer of the gospel.

1. This cannot be so commanded, because they had now any more right of themselves thereto than had any of the nations of the world; for their sins had divested them of all self-deservings.

2. Nor yet, because they stood upon the advance-ground with the worst of the sinners of the nations; nay, rather, the sinners of the nations had the advance-ground of them: for Jerusalem was, long before she had added this iniquity to her sin, worse than the very nations that God cast out before the children of Israel; 2 Chron. xxxiii.

3. It must therefore follow, that this clause, Begin at Jerusalem, was put into this commission of mere grace and compassion, even from the overflowings of the bowels of mercy; for indeed they were the worst, and so in the most deplorable condition of any people under the heavens.

Whatever, therefore, their relation was to Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, however they formerly had been the people among whom God had placed his name and worship, they were now degenerated from God, more than the nations were from their idols, and were become guilty of the highest sins which the people of the world were capable of committing. Nay, none can be capable of committing of such pardonable sins as they committed against their God, when they slew his Son, and persecuted his name and word.

From these words, therefore, thus explained, we gain this observation:

That Jesus Christ would have mercy offered in the first place to the biggest sinners.

That these Jerusalem sinners were the biggest sinners that ever were in the world, I think none will deny, that believes that Christ was the best man that ever was in the world, and also was their Lord God. And that they were to have the first offer of his grace, the text is as clear as the sun; for it saith, "Begin at Jerusalem." "Preach," saith he, "repentance and remission of sins" to the Jerusalem sinners: to the Jerusalem sinners in the first place.

One would a-thought, since the Jerusalem sinners were the worst and greatest sinners, Christ's greatest enemies, and those that not only despised his person, doctrine, and miracles, but that a little before had had their hands up to the elbows in his heart-blood, that he should rather have said, Go into all the world, and preach repentance and remission of sins among all nations; and after that offer the same to Jerusalem; yea, it had been infinite grace, if he had said so. But what grace is this, or what name shall we give it, when he commands that this repentance and remission of sins, which is designed to be preached in all nations, should first be offered to Jerusalem, in the first place to the worst of sinners!

Nor was this the first time that the grace which was in the heart of Christ thus shewed itself to the world. For while he was yet alive, even while he was yet in Jerusalem, and perceived even among these Jerusalem sinners, which was the most vile amongst them, he still in his preaching did signify that he had a desire that the worst of these worst should in the first place come unto him. The which he sheweth, where he saith to the better sort of them, "The publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of God before you;" Matt. xxi. 31. Also when he compared Jerusalem with the sinners of the nations, then he commands that the Jerusalem sinners should have the gospel at present confined to them. "Go not," saith he, "into the way of the Gentiles, and into any of the cities of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" Matt. x. 5, 6; chap. xxiii. 37; but go rather to them, for they were in the most fearful plight.

These therefore must have the cream of the gospel, namely, the first offer thereof in his lifetime: yea, when he departed out of the world, he left this as part of his last will with his preachers, that they also should offer it first to Jerusalem. He had a mind, a careful mind, as it seems, to privilege the worst of sinners with the first offer of mercy, and to take from among them a people to be the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb.

The 15th of Luke also is famous for this, where the Lord Jesus takes more care, as appears there by three parables, for the lost sheep, lost groat, and the prodigal son, than for the other sheep, the other pence, or for the son that said he had never transgressed, yea, he shows that there is joy in heaven, among the angels of God, at the repentance of one sinner, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance; Luke xv.

After this manner therefore the mind of Christ was set on the salvation of the biggest sinners in his lifetime. But join to this, this clause, which he carefully put into the apostles' commission to preach, when he departed hence to the Father, and then you shall see that his heart was vehemently set upon it; for these were part of his last words with them, Preach my gospel to all nations, but see that you begin at Jerusalem.

Nor did the apostles overlook this clause when their Lord was gone into heaven: they went first to them of Jerusalem, and preached Christ's gospel to them: they abode also there for a season and time, and preached it to no body else, for they had regard to the commandment of their Lord.

And it is to be observed, namely, that the first sermon which they preached after the ascension of Christ, it was preached to the very worst of these Jerusalem sinners, even to these that were the murderers of Jesus Christ, Acts ii. 23, for these are part of the sermon: "Ye took him, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain him." Yea, the next sermon, and the next, and also the next to that, was preached to the self-same murderers, to the end they might be saved; Acts iii. 14–16; chap. iv. 10, 11; chap. v. 30; chap. vii. 52.

But we will return to the first sermon that was preached to these Jerusalem sinners, by which will be manifest more than great grace, if it be duly considered.

For after that Peter, and the rest of the apostles, had, in their exhortation, persuaded these wretches to believe that they had killed the Prince of life, and after they had duly fallen under the guilt of their murder, saying, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" he replies, by an universal tender to them all in general, considering them as Christ's killers, that if they were sorry for what they had done, and would be baptized for the remission of their sins in his name, they should receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; Acts ii. 37, 38.

This he said to them all, though he knew that they were such sinners. Yea, he said it without the least stick or stop, or pause of spirit, as to whether he had best to say so or no. Nay, so far off was Peter from making an objection against one of them, that by a particular clause in his exhortation, he endeavours, that not one of them may escape the salvation offered. "Repent," saith he, "and be baptized every one of you." I shut out never a one of you; for I am commanded by my Lord to deal with you, as it were, one by one, by the word of his salvation. But why speaks he so particularly?

Oh! there were reasons for it. The people with whom the apostles were now to deal, as they were murderers of our Lord, and to be charged in the general with his blood, so they had their various and particular acts of villany in the guilt thereof, now lying upon their consciences. And the guilt of these their various and particular acts of wickedness, could not perhaps be reached to a removal thereof, but by this particular application. Repent every one of you; be baptized every one of you, in his name, for the remission of sins, and you shall, every one of you, receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Object. But I was one of them that plotted to take away his life. May I be saved by him?

Peter. Every one of you.

Object. But I was one of them that bare false witness against him. Is there grace for me?

Peter. For every one of you.

Object. But I was one of them that cried out, Crucify him, crucify him; and desired that Barabbas the murderer might live, rather than him. What will become of me, think you?

Peter. I am to preach repentance and remission of sins to every one of you, says Peter.

Object. But I was one of them that did spit in his face when he stood before his accusers. I also was one that mocked him, when in anguish he hanged bleeding on the tree. Is there room for me?

Peter. For every one of you, says Peter.

Object. But I was one of them that in his extremity said, give him gall and vinegar to drink. Why may not I expect the same when anguish and guilt is upon me?

Peter. Repent of these your wickednesses, and here is remission of sins for every one of you.

Object. But I railed on him, I reviled him, I hated him, I rejoiced to see him mocked at by others. Can there be hopes for me?

Peter. There is for every one of you. “Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Oh! what a blessed “Every one of you,” is here! How willing was Peter, and the Lord Jesus, by his ministry, to catch these murderers with the word of the gospel, that they might be made monuments of the grace of God! How unwilling, I say, was he, that any of these should escape the hand of mercy! Yea, what an amazing wonder it is to think, that above all the world, and above every body in it, these should have the first offer of mercy! “Beginning at Jerusalem.”

But was there not something of moment in this clause of the commission? Did not Peter, think you, see a great deal in it, that he should thus begin with these men, and thus offer, so particularly, this grace to each particular man of them?

But, as I told you, this is not all; these Jerusalem sinners must have this offer again and again; every one of them must be offered it over and over. Christ would not take their first rejection for a denial, nor their second repulse for a denial; but he will have grace offered once, and twice, and thrice, to these Jerusalem sinners. Is not this amazing grace? Christ will not be put off. These are the sinners that are sinners indeed. They are sinners of the biggest sort; consequently such as Christ can, if they convert and be saved, best serve his ends and designs upon. Of which more anon.

But what a pitch of grace is this! Christ is minded to amaze the world, and to shew, that he acteth not like the children of men. This is that which he said of old. “I will not execute the fierceness of my wrath, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man;” Hos. xi. 9. This is not the manner of men; men are shorter winded; men are soon moved to take vengeance, and to right themselves in a way of wrath and indignation. But God is full of grace, full of patience, ready to forgive, and one that delights in mercy. All this is seen in our text. The biggest sinners must first be offered mercy; they must, I say, have the cream of the gospel offered unto them.

But we will a little proceed. In the third chapter we find, that they who escaped converting by the first sermon, are called upon again, to accept of grace and forgiveness, for their murder committed upon the Son of God. You have killed, yea, “you have denied, the holy one and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life.” Mark, he falls again upon the very men that actually were, as you have it in the chapters following, his very betrayers and murderers, Acts iii. 14, 15; as being loath that they should escape the mercy of forgiveness; and exhorts them again to repent, that their sins might “be blotted out;” verses 19, 20.

Again, in the fourth chapter, he charges them afresh with this murder, ver. 10; but withal tells them, salvation is in no other. Then, like a heavenly decoy, he puts himself also among them, to draw them the better under the net of the gospel; saying, “There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved;” ver. 12.

In the fifth chapter you find them railing at him, because he continued preaching among them salvation in the name of Jesus. But he tells them, that that very Jesus whom they had slain and hanged on a tree, him God had raised up, and exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins: ver. 29–31. Still insinuating, that though they had killed him, and to this day rejected him, yet his business was to bestow upon them repentance and forgiveness of sins.

’Tis true, after they began to kill again, and when nothing but killing would serve their turn, then they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Yet even some of them so hankered after the conversion of the Jews, that they preached the gospel only to them. Also the apostles still made their abode at Jerusalem, in hopes that they might yet let down their net for another draught of these Jerusalem sinners. Neither did Paul and Barnabas, who were the ministers of God to the Gentiles, but offer the gospel, in the first place, to those of them that for their wickedness were scattered like vagabonds among the nations; yea, and when they rendered rebellion and blasphemy for their service and love, they replied, it was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to them; Acts i. 8; chap. xiii. 46, 47.

Nor was this their preaching unsuccessful among these people: but the Lord Jesus so wrought with the word thus spoken, that thousands of them came flocking to him for mercy. Three thousand of them closed with him at the first; and afterwards two thousand more; for now they were in number about five thousand; whereas before sermons were preached to these murderers, the number of the disciples was not above “a hundred and twenty;” Acts i. 15; chap. ii. 41; chap. iv. 4.

Also among these people that thus flocked to him for mercy, there was a “great company of the priests;” chap. vi. 7. Now the priests were they that were the greatest of these biggest sinners; they were the ringleaders, they were the inventors and ringleaders in the mischief. It was they that set the people against the Lord Jesus, and that were the cause why the uproar increased, until Pilate had given sentence upon him. “The chief priests and elders,” says the text, “persuaded (the people) the multitude,” that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus; Matt. xxvii. 20. And yet behold the priests, yea, a great company of the priests, became obedient to the faith.

Oh the greatness of the grace of Christ, that he should be thus in love with the souls of Jerusalem sinners! that he should be thus delighted with the salvation of the Jerusalem sinners! that he should not only will that his gospel should be offered them, but that it should be offered unto them first, and before other sinners were admitted to a hearing of it. “Begin at Jerusalem.”

Were this doctrine well believed, where would there be a place for a doubt, or a fear of the damnation of the soul, if the sinner be penitent, how bad a life soever he has lived, how many soever in number are his sins?

But this grace is hid from the eyes of men; the devil hides it from them; for he knows it is alluring, he knows it has an attracting virtue in it: for this is it that above all arguments can draw the soul to God.

I cannot help it, but must let drop another word. The first church, the Jerusalem church, from whence the gospel was to be sent into all the world, was a church made up of Jerusalem sinners.

These great sinners were here the most shining monuments of the exceeding grace of God.

Thus you see I have proved the doctrine; and that not only by showing you that this was the practice of the Lord Jesus Christ in his lifetime, but his last will when he went up to God; saying, Begin to preach at Jerusalem.

Yea, it is yet further manifested, in that when his ministers first began to preach there, he joined his power to the word, to the converting of thousands of his betrayers and murderers, and also many of the ringleading priests to the faith.

I shall now proceed, and shall show you,

1. The reasons of the point:
2. And then make some application of the whole.

The observation, you know, is this: Jesus Christ would have mercy offered, in the first place, to the biggest sinners, to the Jerusalem sinners: “Preach repentance, and remission of sins, in my name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

The reasons of the point are:

First, Because the biggest sinners have most need thereof. He that has most need, reason says, should be helped first. I mean, when a helping hand is offered, and now it is: for the gospel of the grace of God is sent to help the world; Acts xvi. 9. But the biggest sinner has most need. Therefore, in reason, when mercy is sent down from heaven to men, the worst of men should have the first offer of it. “Begin at Jerusalem.” This is the reason which the Lord Christ himself renders, why in his lifetime he left the best, and turned him to the worst; why he sat so loose from the righteous, and stuck so close to the wicked. “The whole,” saith he, “have no need of the physician, but the sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance;” Mark ii. 15–47.

Above you read, that the scribes and pharisees said to his disciples, “How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?” Alas! they did not know the reason: but the Lord renders

them one, and such an one as is both natural and cogent, saying, These have need, most need. Their great necessity requires that I should be most friendly, and show my grace first to them.

Not that the other were sinless, and so had no need of a Saviour; but the publicans and their companions were the biggest sinners; they were, as to view, worse than the scribes; and therefore in reason should be helped first, because they had most need of a Saviour.

Men that are at the point to die have more need of the physician than they that are but now and then troubled with an heart-fainting qualm. The publicans and sinners were, as it were, in the mouth of death; death was swallowing of them down: and therefore the Lord Jesus receives them first, offers them mercy first. “The whole have no need of the physician, but the sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” The sick, as I said, is the biggest sinner, whether he sees his disease or not. He is stained from head to foot, from heart to life and conversation. This man, in every man’s judgment, has the most need of mercy. There is nothing attends him from bed to board, and from board to bed again, but the visible characters, and obvious symptoms, of eternal damnation. This therefore is the man that has need, most need; and therefore in reason should be helped in the first place. Thus it was with the people concerned in the text, they were the worst of sinners, Jerusalem sinners, sinners of the biggest size; and therefore such as had the greatest need; wherefore they must have mercy offered to them, before it be offered any where else in the world.

“Begin at Jerusalem,” offer mercy first to a Jerusalem sinner. This man has most need, he is farthest from God, nearest to hell, and so one that has most need. This man’s sins are in number the most, in cry the loudest, in weight the heaviest, and consequently will sink him soonest: wherefore he has most need of mercy. This man is shut up in Satan’s hand, fastest bound in the cords of his sins: one that justice is whetting his sword to cut off; and therefore has most need, not only of mercy, but that it should be extended to him in the first place.

But a little further to show you the true nature of this reason, to wit, That Jesus Christ would have mercy offered, in the first place, to the biggest sinners.

First, Mercy ariseth from the bowels and compassion, from pity, and from a feeling of the condition of those in misery. “In his love, and in his pity, he saveth us.” And again, “The Lord is pitiful, very pitiful, and of great mercy;” Isa. lxiii. 9; James v. 11.

Now, where pity and compassion is, there is yearning of bowels; and where there is that, there is a readiness to help. And, I say again, the more deplorable and dreadful the condition is, the more directly doth bowels and compassion turn themselves to such, and offer help and deliverance. All this flows from our first scripture proof; I came to call them that have need; to call them first, while the rest look on and murmur.

“How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?” Ephraim was a revolter from God, a man that had given himself up to devilism: a company of men, the ten tribes, that worshipped devils, while Judah kept with his God. “But how shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? (and yet thou art worse than they: nor has Samaria committed half thy sins); Ezek. xvi. 46–51. My heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together;” Hos. xi. 8.

But where do you find that ever the Lord did thus yearn in his bowels for and after any self-righteous man? No, no; they are the publicans and harlots, idolaters and Jerusalem sinners, for whom his bowels thus yearn and tumble about within him: for, alas! poor worms, they have most need of mercy.

Had not the good Samaritan more compassion for that man that fell among thieves (though that fall was occasioned by his going from the place where they worshipped God, to Jericho, the cursed city) than we read he had for any other besides? His wine was for him, his oil was for him, his beast for him; his penny, his care, and his swaddling bands for him; for alas! wretch, he had most need; Luke x. 30–35.

Zaccheus the publican, the chief of the publicans, one that had made himself the richer by wronging of others; the Lord at that time singled him out from all the rest of his brother publicans, and that in the face of many Pharisees, and proclaimed in the audience of them all, that that day salvation was come to his house; Luke xix. 1–8.

The woman also that had been bound down by Satan for eighteen years together, his compassions putting him upon it, he loosed her, though those that stood by snarled at him for so doing; Luke xiii. 11–13,

And why the woman of Sarepta, and why Naaman the Syrian, rather than widows and lepers in Israel, but because their conditions were more deplorable, (for that) they were most forlorn, and farthest from help; Luke iv. 25, 27.

But I say, why all these, thus named? why have we not a catalogue of some holy men that were so in their own eyes, and in the judgment of the world? Alas if at any time any of them are mentioned, how seemingly coldly doth the record of scripture present them to us? Nicodemus, a night professor, and Simon the pharisee, with his fifty pence; and their great ignorance of the methods of grace, we have now and then touched upon.

Mercy seems to be out of his proper channel, when it deals with self-righteous men; but then it runs with a full stream when it extends itself to the biggest sinners. As God's mercy is not regulated by man's goodness, nor obtained by man's worthiness; so not much set out by saving of any such.

But more of this anon.

And here let me ask my reader a question: suppose that as thou art walking by some pond side, thou shouldst espy in it four or five children all in danger of drowning, and one in more danger than all the rest, judge which has most need to be helped out first? I know thou wilt say, he that is nearest drowning. Why, this is the case; the bigger sinner, the nearer drowning; therefore the bigger sinner the more need of mercy; yea, of help by mercy in the first place. And to this our text agrees, when it saith, "Beginning at Jerusalem." Let the Jerusalem sinner, says Christ, have the first offer, the first invitation, the first tender of my grace and mercy, for he is the biggest sinner, and so has most need thereof.

Secondly, Christ Jesus would have mercy offered in the first place to the biggest sinners, because when they, any of them, receive it, it redounds most to the fame of his name.

Christ Jesus, as you may perceive, has put himself under the term of a physician, a doctor for curing of diseases: and you know that applause and fame, are things that physicians much desire.

That is it that helps them to patients, and that also that will help their patients to commit themselves to their skill for cure, with the more confidence and repose of spirit. And the best way for a doctor or physician to get himself a name, is, in the first place, to take in hand, and cure some such as all others have given off for lost and dead. Physicians get neither name nor fame by pricking of wheals, or pricking out thistles, or by laying of plaisters to the scratch of a pin; every old woman can do this.

But if they would have a name and a fame, if they will have it quickly they must, as I said, do some great and desperate cures. Let them fetch one to life that was dead; let them recover one to his wits that was mad; let them make one that was born blind to see; or let them give ripe wits to a fool; these are notable cures, and he that can do thus, and if he doth thus first, he shall have the name and fame he desires; he may lie a-bed till noon.

Why, Christ Jesus forgiveth sins for a name, and so begets of himself a good report in the hearts of the children of men. And therefore in reason he must be willing, as also he did command, that his mercy should be offered first to the biggest sinners.

"I will forgive their sins, iniquities, and transgressions," says he, "and it shall turn to me for a name of joy, and a praise and an honour, before all the nations of the earth;" Jer. xxxiii. 8, 9.

And hence it is, that at his first appearing he took upon him to do such mighty works: he got a fame thereby, he got a name thereby; Matt. iv. 23, 24.

When Christ had cast the legion of devils out of the man of whom you read, Mark v., he bid him go home to his friends, and tell it: “Go home,” saith he, “to thy friends, and tell them how great things God has done for thee, and has had compassion on thee;” Mark v. 19. Christ Jesus seeks a name, and desireth a fame in the world; and therefore, or the better to obtain that, he commands that mercy should first be proffered to the biggest sinners, because, by the saving of one of them he makes all men marvel. As ’tis said of the man last mentioned, whom Christ cured towards the beginning of his ministry: “And he departed,” says the text, “and began to publish in Decapolis, how great things Jesus had done for him; and all men did marvel,” ver. 20.

When John told Christ, that they saw one casting out devils in his name, and they forbade him, because he followed not with them, what is the answer of Christ? “Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.” No; they will rather cause his praise to be heard, and his name to be magnified, and so put glory on the head of Christ.

But we will follow a little our metaphor: Christ, as I said, has put himself under the term of a physician; consequently he desireth that his fame, as to the salvation of sinners, may spread abroad, and that the world may see what he can do. And to this end, he has not only commanded, that the biggest sinners should have the first offer of his mercy, but has, as physicians do, put out his bills, and published his doings, that things may be read and talked of. Yea, he has moreover, in these his blessed bills, the holy scriptures I mean, inserted the very names of persons, the places of their abode, and the great cures that, by the means of his salvations, he has wrought upon them to this very end. Here is, *Item*, such a one, by my grace and redeeming blood, was made a monument of everlasting life; and such a one, by my perfect obedience, became an heir of glory. And then he produceth their names.

Item, I saved Lot from the guilt and damnation that he had procured to himself by his incest.

Item, I saved David from the vengeance that belonged to him for committing of adultery and murder.

Here is also Solomon, Manasseh, Peter, Magdalen, and many others, made mention of in this book. Yea, here are their names, their sins, and their salvations recorded together, that you may read and know what a Saviour he is, and do him honour in the world. For why are these things thus recorded, but to show to sinners what he can do, to the praise and glory of his grace?

And it is observable, as I said before, we have but very little of the salvation of little sinners mentioned in God’s book, because that would not have answered the design, to wit, to bring glory and fame to the name of the Son of God.

What should be the reason, think you, why Christ should so easily take a denial of the great ones, that were the grandeur of the world, and struggle so hard for hedge-creepers and highwaymen (as that parable, Luke xiv., seems to import he doth), but to show forth the riches of the glory of his grace to his praise? This I say, is one reason to be sure.

They that had their grounds, their yoke of oxen, and their marriage joys, were invited to come; but they made their excuse, and that served the turn. But when he comes to deal with the worst, he saith to his servants, Go ye out and bring them in hither. “Go out quickly, and bring in hither the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind.” And they did so: and he said again, “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled;” Luke xiv. 18, 19, 23. These poor, lame, maimed, blind, hedge-creepers and highwaymen, must come in, must be forced in. These, if saved, will make his merits shine.

When Christ was crucified, and hanged up between the earth and heavens, there were two thieves crucified with him; and behold, he lays hold of one of them and will have him away with him to glory. Was not this a strange act, and a display of unthought of grace? Were there none but thieves there, or were the rest of that company out of his reach? Could he not, think you, have stooped from the cross to the ground, and have laid hold on some honest man if he would? Yes, doubtless. Oh! but then he would not have displayed his grace, nor so have pursued his own designs, namely, to get to himself a praise and a name: but now he has done it to purpose. For who that shall read this story,

but must confess, that the Son of God is full of grace; for a proof of the riches thereof, he left behind him, when upon the cross he took the thief away with him to glory. Nor can this one act of his be buried; it will be talked of to the end of the world to his praise. “Men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts, and will declare thy greatness; they shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom;” Psalm cxlv. 6–12.

When the word of God came among the conjurers and those soothsayers that you read of, Acts xix., and had prevailed with some of them to accept of the grace of Christ, the Holy Ghost records it with a boast, for that it would redound to his praise, saying, “And many of them that used curious arts, brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed;” Acts xix. 19, 20. It wrenched out of the clutches of Satan some of those of whom he thought himself most sure.

“So mightily grew the word of God.” It grew mightily, it encroached upon the kingdom of the devil. It pursued him, and took the prey; it forced him to let go his hold: it brought away captive, as prisoners taken by force of arms, some of the most valiant of his army: it fetched back from, as it were, the confines of hell, some of those that were his most trusty, and that with hell had been at an agreement: it made them come and confess their deeds, and burn their books before all men: “So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed.”

Thus, therefore, you see why Christ will have mercy offered in the first place to the biggest sinners; they have most need thereof; and this is the most ready way to extol his name that rideth upon the heavens to our help. But,

Thirdly, Christ Jesus would have mercy offered in the first place to the biggest sinners, because by their forgiveness and salvation, others hearing of it, will be encouraged the more to come to him for life.

For the physician, by curing the most desperate at the first, doth not only get himself a name, but begets encouragement in the minds of other diseased folk to come to him for help. Hence you read of our Lord, that after, through his tender mercy, he had cured many of great diseases, his fame was spread abroad, “They brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy, and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and Decapolis, and Jerusalem, and Judea, and from beyond Jordan;” Matt. iv. 24, 25.

See here, he first by working gets himself a fame, a name, and renown, and now men take encouragement, and bring from all quarters their diseased to him, being helped, by what they had heard, to believe that their diseased should be healed.

Now, as he did with those outward cures, so he does in the proffers of his grace and mercy: he proffers that in the first place to the biggest sinners, that others may take heart to come to him to be saved. I will give you a scripture or two, I mean to show you that Christ, by commanding that his mercy should in the first place be offered to the biggest of sinners, has a design thereby to encourage and provoke others to come also to him for mercy.

“God,” saith Paul, “who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” But why did he do all this? “That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus;” Eph. ii. 4–7.

See, here is a design; God lets out his mercy to Ephesus of design, even to shew to the ages to come the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness to them through Christ Jesus. And why to shew by these the exceeding riches of his grace to the ages to come, through Christ Jesus, but to allure them, and their children also, to come to him, and to partake of the same grace through Christ Jesus?

But what was Paul, and the Ephesian sinners? (of Paul we will speak anon). These Ephesian sinners, they were men dead in sins, men that walked according to the dictates and motions of the devil; worshippers of Diana, that effeminate goddess; men far off from God, aliens and strangers to all good things; such as were far off from that, as I said, and consequently in a most deplorable condition.

As the Jerusalem sinners were of the highest sort among the Jews, so these Ephesian sinners were of the highest sort among the Gentiles; Eph. ii. 1–3, 11, 12; Acts xix. 35.

Wherefore as by the Jerusalem sinners, in saving them first, he had a design to provoke others to come to him for mercy, so the same design is here set on foot again, in his calling and converting the Ephesian sinners, “That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace,” says he, “in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.” There is yet one hint behind. It is said that God saved these for his love; that is, as I think, for the setting forth, for the commendations of his love, for the advance of his love, in the hearts and minds of them that should come after. As who should say, God has had mercy upon, and been gracious to you, that he might shew to others, for their encouragement, that they have ground to come to him to be saved. When God saves one great sinner, it is to encourage another great sinner to come to him for mercy.

He saved the thief, to encourage thieves to come to him for mercy; he saved Magdalen, to encourage other Magdalens to come to him for mercy; he saved Saul, to encourage Sauls to come to him for mercy; and this Paul himself doth say, “For this cause,” saith he, “I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting;” 1 Tim. i. 16.

How plain are the words! Christ, in saving of me, has given to the world a pattern of his grace, that they might see and believe, and come, and be saved; that they that are to be born hereafter might believe on Jesus Christ to life everlasting.

But what was Paul? Why, he tells you himself; I am, says he, the chief of sinners: I was, says he, a blaspheme; a persecutor, an injurious person; but I obtained mercy; 1 Tim. i. 14, 15. Ay, that is well for you, Paul; but what advantage have we thereby? Oh, very much, saith he; for, “for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might shew all long-suffering for a pattern to them which shall believe on him to life everlasting.”

Thus, therefore, you see that this third reason is of strength, namely, that Jesus Christ would have mercy offered in the first place to the biggest sinners, because, by their forgiveness and salvation, others, hearing of it, will be encouraged the more to come to him for mercy.

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